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VARANASI THROUGH THE AGES

युग-युगों में काशी

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BHAIRAVA : KOTWĀL OF VĀRĀṆASĪ

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Bhairava, terrifying aspect of Śiva, is the god of transgression par excellence, for he appears only to cut off the fifth head of Brahmā, brahminicide being the most heinous crime in the Hindu tradition.[1] Yet Bhairava's example was ritually imitated by the gruesome Kāpālika ascetics, who still have their successors in the modern Aghoris and Nāths, who have greatly contributed to the spread of his cult.[2] To this day, there are isolated reports in the newspapers of human sacrifices being offered to terrifying divinities like Bhairava and his female counterpart Bhairavi for the attainment of magical powers and the undying force of the imagery surrounding them in the Hindu psyche is testified to by its vivid exploitation in contemporary cinema.[3] In Nepal, as in

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1. The numerous versions of this Brahmaśiraśchhedaka myth from the Purāṇas can be found assembled and partly analyzed in the following 4 works : H. von Stietencron "Bhairava." *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenlandischen Gesellschaft* (=ZDMG), Supplementa I, Teil 3 (1969), 863-71; W. D. O. Flaherty, *Asceticism and Eroticism in the Mythology of Śiva* (1973, rpt., Delhi : Oxford Univ. Press, 1975), pp. 123-7, and also in her "Śiva as Outcaste and Heretic : *The Kāpālika*, "*The origins of Evil in Hindu Mythology* (Delhi : Motilal Banarsidass, 1976), pp. 277-86; S. Kramrisch, "Bhairava," ch. 10. *The Presence of Śiva* (Delhi : Oxford Univ. Press, 1981), pp. 250-300. I have presented my own condensed but comprehensive interpretation of this central myth, through a critical evaluation of these earlier analyses, in my paper on "Adepts of the god Bhairava in the Hindu Tradition," Proceedings of seminar on theme no. 9 "Spiritual Disciplines and Practices." Assembly of the World's Religions, 15-21 Nov. 1985 (New York).
2. D. Lorenzen, *The Kāpālikas and Kālāmukhas* : *Two Lost Śaiva Sects* (Delhi : Thomson Press, 1972) : J. Parry, "Sacrificial Death and the Necrophagous Ascetic," in *Death and the Regeneration of Life*, ed. M. Bloch and J. Parry (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1982), pp. 74-110, for Aghoris in Vārāṇasī. G. W. Briggs, *Gorakhnāth and the Kānphaṭā yogis* (1938, rpt. Delhi : Motilal Banarasidass, 1982), pp. 218-27, 159-61; G. Unbescheid, *Kānphaṭā : Untersuchungen zu Kult, Mythologie und Geschichte Śivaitischer Tantriker in Nepal*, Beiträge zur Südasienforschung, Südasien-Institut, Universität Heidelberg, Band 63 (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1980).
3. In the Hindi film *Pātāla-Bhairavī* "Bhairavī of the Nether World," now playing in cinemas all over North India including Banaras, the Tantric adept seeks magical powers through human sacrifice to the Goddess. Though the message of the film is modern and recommends rejection of such dangerous powers, the scenario is the stereotyped traditional one.

Bali, he is identified with the bloody epic hero Bhimasena, whose acts of sacrificial slaughter are given a tantric interpretation, while his wife Draupadī is identified with Bhairavī, and their joint cult is very popular among the Newars.[4] Unlike most other Hindu divinities he enjoys a "folk" cult that extends to various tribal cultures on the periphery of or even beyond the Hindu cultural limits and has conversely been instrumental in the "hinduization" of savage tribal deities.[5]

At the same time, in his eight-fold manifestation he also presides, either alone or paired as consort with the eight mother goddesses (*ashṭamātṛkā*), over the spatio-ritual organization of sacred cities like Vārāṇasī. In this centre of Hindu culture, Bhairava reigns as the policeman-magistrate (*kotwal*), to whom pilgrims swarming in from the furthest reaches of the sub-continent must necessarily pay obeisance.[6] In Nepal he is practically the national god of many festivals, so much so that Akash Bhairab has been adopted as the emblem of the Royal Nepali Airlines.[7] Though historically a late divinity, he appears as the *axis-mundi* or primordial world-pillar and plays a central role in cosmogonic New Year festivals deriving from an archaic Vedic model, like the Bisket Jātra in Nepal.[8] In one such festival, the Nuwakot Bhairavī Rath Jātrā, he incarnates himself for the sake of the community and its renewal in the hereditory function of the *dhāmī*, through whom he participates in bloody rites culminating in

4. M. Anderson, *The Festivals of Nepal* (London : Allen and Unwin, 1971).
5. G. D. Sontheimer, *Birobā, Mhaskobā und Khaṇḍobā* : *Ursprung, Geschichte und Umwelt von Pāstoralen Gottheiten in Mahārāṣṭra*, Schiftenreihe des Südasien-Instituts der Universität Heidelberg, Band 21 (Wiesbaden : Franz Steiner Verlag, 1976). H. von Stietencron, "The Śaiva Component in the Early Evolution of Jagannātha," ch. 6, and A. Eschmann, "Śaiva Typology of Hinduization," pp. 94-7, in *The Cult of Jagannātha and the Regional Tradition of Orissa*, ed. A. Eschmann, H. Kulke and G. C. Tripathi (Delhi : Manohar, 1978). A summary of some such phenomena with a critique of genetic approaches seeking the origin of Bhairava in non-brahminical even pre-Aryan substratums may be found in my section on "Bhairava as 'Hinduizer' of Tribal Divinities" (op. cit.).
6. D. L. Eck, *Banaras* : *City of Light* (London : Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983), pp. 189-97; pp. 362-3 for list and location of the *ashṭa-bhairava*. For Bhairava as kotwal and cosmic pillar, see also J. Irwin, "The Lat Bhairo at Banaras (Vārāṇasī): Another Pre-Aśokan Monument ?" *ZDMG* Band 133, Heft 2 (1983), 321-52.
7. M. Anderson. Also J. F. Vezies, *Les Fetes Magiques du Nepal* (Paris : Cesare Rancilio, 1981), pp. 162, 70.
8. Anderson, pp. 41-9; esp. Vezies, p. 24. The tall pole then erected is called *liṅga* and explicitly identified with Bhairava; like the erect *liṅga* of Unmatta-Bhairava at the Paśupatināth temple of Kathmandu, it is endowed with powers of fertility and procreation. For the structure of Vedic cosmogony, see F. B. J. Kuiper, *Ancient Indian Cosmogony*, ed. J. Irwin (Delhi : Vikas, 1983).

oracles before the king's representative for the whole of Nepal.[9] He was worshipped by dynasties of kings and is himselfe sometimes attributed royal traits or identified with the Hindu king (Sontheimer, 1976, pp. 192, 250; 1984, 158). In the Kathmandu festival of Pachali Bhairab, he incarnates himself in an impure low-caste dancer once every twelve years to renew the power of the king's sword by ritually exchanging his own sword with the latter.[10] His cult is also officiated by the brahmin Buddhist tantrics called Vajrāchāryas, the priestly elite of the Buddhist half of the Newar caste-society, as also by the semi-untouchable Kusle householders, the successors of the Kāpālikas.[11] He has also been adopted by the esoteric currents of Tibetan tantricism.[12]

Bhairava is the typical protector or guardian of territorial limits (*kshetrapāla*) for more socio-centrally located pure divinities[13] like Viśvanātha in Kāśī and also functions as doorkeeper (*dvārapāla*) at the temples of such, even Jaina, divinities.[14] Though his public worship in the Indian temples is nowadays conducted in a purely innocuous brahminical mode, his major temple festival of Bhairavāshṭamī is wholly derived from the above brahminicide myth, all of whose symbolism is strikingly retained in his iconography.[15] His vehicle, the dog, with whom he is himself also

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9. Vezies, pp. 72-5. We had the good fortune to witness this festival (as also the Bisket Jātrā) in April 1985 and to interview all the participants, most of all the *dhāmī* himself.
10. Anderson, pp. 156-63; also M.S. Slusser, *Nepal Mandala : A Cultural Study of the Kathmandu Valley* (Princeton : Princeton Univ. Press, 1982), I, pp. 238-9.
11. J. K. Locke, *Karunamaya : The Cult of Avalokiteśvara-Matsyendranāth in the Valley of Nepal* (Kathmandu : Centre of Nepal and Asian Studies, Tribhuvan University, 1980), pp. 427-36.
12. The history of the lineage of worship of Vajra-Bhairava, particularly venerated within the Gelugpa sect, is found in the Tibetan text entitled "Jam-Doyangs Bzhao-Pai Rdorje" where the revelation is attributed to Mahāsiddha Lalitavajra of Uddyāna.
13. See esp. M. Biardeau, *L'Hindouisme : Anthropologie d'une Civilisation* (Paris : Flammarion, 1981), p. 149.
14. In Jain temples of Vārānasī, Ujjain and Rajasthan, he is sometimes simply called "protector of the territory" (*kshetrapāla*) or given a new name, Mānabhadra. There are Jaina texts like the *Bhairavapadmāvatīkalpa* which deal with the worship of Bhairava.
15. There are three basic iconographic representations of Bhairava which derive from this myth : as *Brahmaśiraśchhedaka* he grasps by its hair the severed head whose dripping blood is greedily lapped up by his dog; as *Kaṅkālamūrti* spearing a man or already bearing the latter's corpse (or skeleton) on his shoulder. In both cases, he is either naked or wearing a tiger or elephant skin, a garland of human skulls, snakes around his neck and arms, and is grotesque with dark-skin and two monstrous

identified, is the impurest creature in the Hindu bestiary. Most significant of all, he has been adopted by the Kashmīr Śaiva theoreticians, most of them brahmins, as the suprememost expression of the Divine, symbol of a Reality more ultimate than even the Brahman of Śankara. Abhinavagupta, the greatest among them and who has provided us the most synthetic perception we have of brahminical culture, goes so far as to exultantly identify himself with this terrifying brahminicide Bhairava.[16]

It is impossible to do justice to all these diverse and often conflicting aspects of Bhairava within the limits of the present paper.[17] Instead we concentrate on delineating his public role of *Kotwāl* in Vārāṇasī, the centre of Hindu culture, before seeking to reconcile this conservative office of policeman-magistrate with the ideology of transgressive sacrality that forms the very essence of the conception of Bhairava.[18] Vārāṇasī recurs as a constant pole of reference in the South Asian ethnography of the cult of Bhairava. Pachali Bhairab is often depicted as an ancient king of Kāśī (or Lhasa) who used to frequent the cremation grounds on the banks of the Bāgmatī, itself identified with the Gaṅgā, at Kathmandu before he was permanently petrified at his temple there. Kāla Bhairava (or even Kāśī-Viśvanātha) came from Vārāṇasī out of curiosity to witness the Bisket Jātra at Bhaktapur but was discovered and beheaded

fangs. As the milder *Bhikshāṭanamūrti*, he is depicted roaming to beg for alms. See Stietencron (1969), 863. Textual and iconographic references may also be found in M. Adiceam, "The Images of Śiva in South India : II," "Bhairava," *Arts Asiatiques*, vol. 11, fasc. 2 (1965), pp. 23-44; III and IV, "Bhikshāṭanamūrti and Kaṅkālamūrti," ibid., vol. 12 (1965), pp. 83-112.

16. *Antaka māṃ pratimādṛśam enām krodha-karālatamāṃ vinidhehi/śaṅkara-sevana-chintana-dhīro bhīshaṇa-bhairava-śaktimayo'smi//Bhairavastava*, v. 4. Cf. L. Silburn, *Hymnes de Abhinavagupta* (Paris : Institut de Civilisation Indienne, 1970), pp. 48, 50, 53. Also Kramrisch, "The Breakthrough from Time to Eternity" (1981), pp. 281-87.

17. Having done my Ph. D. in Anthropology in Paris (1981) and in Philosophy in Vanarasi (1983) on "The Significance of Unmatta-Bhairava in Hinduism," (unpublished), I am now continuing with my D. Litt. research on "The Cult of Bhairava in North India and Nepal" which requires that I investigate the above phenomena both through textual sources and anthropological field-work. The present paper is based upon my field-work conducted in Banaras especially since January 1984 made possible by a University Grants Commission (UGC, Delhi) post-doctoral Fellowship. I wish to thank Mr. Om Prakash Sharma for his indispensable assistance in my field-work and Dr. Srinarayan Mishra (Sanskrit Dept., B. H. U.) for having accepted to official supervise my research in Banaras.

18. See S. Visuvalingam, "Transgressive Sacrality in the Hindu Tradition," proceedings of seminar on theme no. 9 on "Spiritual Disciplines and Practices," Assembly of the World's Religions, 15-21 Nov, 1985 (New York). Without my continuing discussions with my husband, Sunthar, the theoretical developments outlined in the present paper would not have been possible.

by the officiating tantric priest before he could escape back to Kāśī. A mysterious bundle from the Akash Bhairab temple that always accompanies Bhairab during this festival is believed to contain this head and it is proudly claimed by the inhabitants of Bhaktapur (even if they have never visited Banaras) that the head of Kāla-Bhairava at his temple in Vārāṇasī is not his real head. The Mhaskobā, worshipped by the pastorals and tribals of Mahārāṣṭra at such places like Javalī, Mhasvaḍ, Borban, Vīr and especially Sonārī, is identified by them as the Kāla-Bhairava of the Kāśī-myth who settled down at these places to satisfy his devotees (Sontheimer, 1976, pp. 29, 202, 252). Even where Bhairava reigns independently in cities that are sacred in their own right, like Ujjain, we find that the sacred geography of the latter is modelled on that of Vārāṇasī and Ujjain is substituted for Kāśī as the *tīrtha* where the brahminicide Bhairava came to be absolved of his sin in its own retelling of his origin-myth. These instances could be easily multiplied especially with further research.

"Although the earliest attested use of the term *kotwāl* is an Arabic source of about 1040 A. D., scholars have recently been arguing in favour of earlier Indo-Aryan or Dravidian derivation. We should not lose sight of the fact that Bhairo's policeman-identity prevailed widely in India long before the abolition of the hareditary post of village-policeman in 1864" (Irwin, 1983, p. 351 & n. 83). In the *Hindī Śabdasāgar*,[19] it is given as *kotvār*, *kotvālā* and explained as a) *pulis kā ek pradhān karmachārī*, and, b) *sabhā yā pañchāyat me bhojanādi kā prabandh karanevālā karmachārī*. In Platts Urdu dictionary the word is expounded as follows: *kotwāl* (sanskrit = *Koṭa* or *koshṭha + pāla*) "the keeper or porter of a castle, the chief officer of the police for a city or town, city magistrate;" *kotwālī* (f.) "the status and the office of a *kotwal*, the place of business of a *kotwāl* the chief police station in a town;" *koṭṭa* or *koṭa* "a fort. castle stronghold, a redoubt, wall of a fort or a city, rampart, entrenchment, a mud bank round a field or village, a magic circle traced with sand and ashes." All these meanings contribute to a better understanding of the official status of Kāla-Bhairava in this holy city. It must be noted that the term *kotwal* also refers to a hierarchic position among the Dasnāmī Sanyāsins in their encampment or *akhāḍā*.[20]

"Kāla Bhairava, the 'Black Terror,' is widely known as the *kotwāl*, the 'police chief, of Kāshī, and the section of the city in which his temple stands is known as Kotwālpurī. Dandapāni, the 'Club Carrier,' is Kāshī's sherif" (Eck, p 189). According to the legends and my informants, Bhairava was perplexed about what to do after absolution of his sin of brahminicide at Kāśī and hence Viśvanātha asked him to become *kotwāl* of Kāśī. He accepted but Kāśī appeared to him as a huge Śivaliṅg and, not knowing where to go, he decided to take a dog as his vehicle. Viśvanātha apparently keeps a close eye on Bhairava for the latter functions as door-keeper in his temple, but according to Kailashpati Tiwari, the Mahant of Viśvanātha temple, the image of Kāla Bhairava facing the principal *liṅga* is a late addition

19. Collective work, 2nd vol. (Varanasi : Nāgarī Mudraṇa, 1970).

20. Swāmī Sadananda Giri, *Society and Sanyāsin : A History of the Daśnāmī Sanyāsins* (Rishikesh : Sadananda Giri, 1976), p. 29.

(cf. ground-plan in Eck, p. 122). In any case, Kāla Bhairava was honoured in one of the eight subsidiary pavilions of the grand sixteenth-century temple of Viśvanātha. Particularly interesting is the constant identification of the terrifying (Kāla—) Bhairava with the benign Kāśī-Viśvanātha in the person of the legendary founder of the Bhairava cult in local origin-myths of Nepal Mahārāshṭra (Sontheimer, 1976, p. 29) and other distant parts of India. "The god of the great temple of pilgrimage is—whatever be his name and his myth—the pure god, withdrawn into himself, the god of ultimate salvation. His most 'terrible' forms are besides considered at the limit to be not proper for the cult, because dangerous even for the devotees. They are relegated to the most inaccessible sites, surrounded with all kinds of taboos, pacified with appropriate offerings . . . In short, even though the god is the master of the universe of which the temple is the centre, he does not have *hic et nunce* a direct function of protector. This is delegated to an inferior god, Bhairava being the protector of territory—*kshetrapāla*—in his classic form. The principal sanctuary does not pretend to repesent the god in his supreme form—*contradiction in terminis*—but suggests to the maximum his renunciate nature as the final reason of the world" (Biardeau, 1981, p. 149). Thus the offerings (*prasād*) of Vaśvanātha do not share the inauspicious, dangerous character of the *naivedya* offered to more terrible forms like Bhairava or Chaṇḍa of Śiva (Eck, p. 123). In a subsequent paper, we shall have to examine whether it is a question of simple "confusion" in the above mentioned local myths between the Lord of the Universe and his formidable but lowly body-guard or whether the identity of the two points rather, as we believe, to a hidden transgressive dimension and conception of the central Viśvanātha that would find explicit expression in Bhairava alone, who is supreme divinity in his own right in other esoteric Tantric circles.

The independant temple of Kāla Bhairava, popularly known as Bhaironāth, which is now located between Chaukhambā Lane, the "Main Street" of pre-modern Banāras, and Maidāgin Park, was formerly indeed "a spiritual center in Kāshī for the most severe of Shaiva ascetics, the Kāpālikas or 'Skull-Bearers,' and their later descendants, the Gorakhnāthīs and the Kānphaṭā yogis. These ascetic groups take as their model the ascetic and fearsome Shiva, whose ways run counter to the conventions of ordinary caste society. For them, Bhairava epitomizes this counter-conventional aspect of Shiva . . . . Today, however, the temple is no longer the exclusive domain of such extremist yogis and is, rather patronized by ordinary householders for his protective blessings" (Eck, p. 195; Briggs, p. 84). It is such ascetics, it must be remembered, who have taken Kāśī Viśvanāth, even if only in the form of the transgressive Bhairava, to the furthest corners of the sub-continent. The householder, however, is able to justify his worship, in a public mode, of Bhairava only in terms of the latter's office of *kotwāl*, even if his mythic awareness informs him with the vague impression that the Kāpālika-Bhairava is in some way indeed the ultimate divinity.

The door to the courtyard, at the centre of which is the sixty foot high temple of Kāla-Bhairava, is guarded by his mount, the dog. According to Kuber Nāth Sukul, Kāla Bhairava was reconsecrated in its present location in the thirteenth century, when the

shrines in the Omkāreśvara sector were destroyed following the Muslim conquest. He was housed here in humble quarters in order not to attract adverse attention until 1825 when the tiled hut was replaced by the present temple (Sherring, p. 64). In his inner sanctum of brass, apart from Bhairava's silver mask garlanded with flowers, the rest of the image—pot-bellied, seated upon a dog, holding a trident—is completely covered by an apron. At the foot his throne are silver sandals. The worshippers ring four bells in the porch to his shrine, flanked by two dogs, in order to announce their presence to Bhairava. The circumambulation of the temple enclosure includes an array of subsidiary shrines to Kālī, Hanumān, Gaṇeśa, Kṛshṇa and Rādhā, Kārttikeya, the nine planets (*navagraha*) and several *lingas*. The temple priests administer Bhairava's blessing by striking or dusting off the worshipper with a club of peacock feathers, carried by Bhairava in his sculptural representations (cf. his street-side image at Brahma Nāla described by Eck, pp. 189-90). Further details of shrine and worship may be found in Eck, pp. 193-4.

Though Kāla-Bhairava is the most important and central among them, he is not counted among the eight traditional Bhairavas in the, roughly speaking, eight different directions of the holy city to whom he has relegated his function of *kotwāl*. They are Rūrū ("the Dog") at Hanumān Ghāt protecting the south-east; Chaṇda ("the Fierce") in the Durgā Temple at Durgā Kuṇd in the South; Asitāṅga ("the Black-limbed") now located in a niche in the Vṛddhakāleśvara temple near the well of nectar (*amṛtakūpa*) in the east; Kapāli ("the Skull-bearer") now at Lāṭ Bhairava in the north-west; Krodhana ("the Wrathful") within the sanctum of the Kāmākshī Devī temple at Kamacchā protecting the south-west; Unmatta ("the Mad") in a small shrine at the village of Deurahana on the Pañchakrośī road between Kardameśvara and Bhīmachaṇḍī protecting the West; Saṁhāra ("the Destroyer") in his small temple near Pātan Darvāzā in the north-east; and Bhīshaṇa ("the Terrible") in his small temple in the district southwest of Maidāgin protecting the north. Rūrū, within the Jūnā, significantly also called "Bhairava", Akhāḍā, is beautifully moustached with two eyes and beautiful hair bearing the crescent-moon. Seated on a dog, he wears elephant-skin, large ear-rings, and serpents as ornament. Wearing a garland of skulls, he has scorpions on his arm Chaṇḍa in his small shrine is black, holds a *daṇḍa* (staff) and *damaru* (drum), and is accompanied by his dog. Asitāṅga is very mutilated. The Kapāli Bhairava of the Purāṇas was, it seems, originally in the Serpent Well (Nāg Kuān) area of northern Kāśī and has only recently been identified with its present site at the Kapālamochana Tīrtha, which was itself originally further south (Eck, p. 196). Krodhana is a black image with dog as vehicle. Unmatta raises one leg in the *tāṇḍava* (dancing) pose and smiles blissfully, wearing large ear-rings and a garland of *rudrāksha*. His "madness" is indicated by saliva trickling from his mouth onto his throat (Unmatta-Bhairava, in my mss. is repeatedly called *lalajjihvā* or "drooling-tongued," saliva being very impure) and he clasps an oval-shaped fruit, evidently a mango, on his breast. His hair is bundled up in tresses (*jaṭā*). The black image of Saṁhāra is accompanied by his dog and there are two foot-prints (*pādukā*) at the entrance to his temple, which also contains images of Hanumān and Baṭuka Bhairava. Bhūta or Bhīsaṇa in the district

named Bhūta Bhairava after him has a large head with imposing moustache and beaming smile and is likewise accompanied by his dog.

It is not so much the particular identity of any specific Bhairava that is important but rather that they form a traditional group of eight spatially distributed in different quarters. From this perspective, it does not matter much if some of the shrines, like those of Kapāli or Rūrū (formerly on the *ghat* itself outside the *akhāḍā*) or even Kāla, have been displaced in the course of history or that all of them are dated from the eighteenth century (their worship being definitely older). That the arbitrary growth of the numerous Bhairava temples is nevertheless governed and shaped by a preconceived theological system basad on the number eight (or sixty-four = eight times eight in other contexts) is revealed by the fact that the most important pilgrimage sequence during the month of Mārgaśīrsha is during its first eight days when each of the *ashṭabhairava* is visited in turn and in the order of enumeration above; each Bhairava being visited on a different day. The celebration of Kāla Bhairava, the city's guardian magistrate, as the climax of this sequence on Bhairavāshṭamī, "Bhairava's Eighth" (Eck, p. 274) further emphasizes their being only the eightfold manifestation of the former's central authority. That the inspiration behind such eight-fold organization of ritual space and time derives from the typically transgressive ideology of tantricism rather than being modelled on a system of practical police adminstration may be easily realized from the fact that the term *bhairavāshṭaka* refers to a stereotyped set of eight Bhairava-tantras, six of whose presiding Bhairavas belong to the *ashṭabhairava* of Vārāṇasī. The other two, viz. Saṁhāra and Bhīshaṇa, are characteristically replaced by Svachchhanda and some other Bhairava, like Mahocchusma.

Apart from the above classical eight Bhairavas there are images of Bhairava scattered all about the city, either open-air or housed in small temples or in subsidiary position in the temple of some other divinity. His temples often also shelter images of Gaṇeśa, Kālī, Hanumān or a Śivaliṅga. Very often he is merely an amorphous stone heavily bedecked with vermillion. In the south-west corner of the great Viśvanātha temple is a beautiful image of Bhairava. Since the southern Kedāra khaṇḍa or sector is a microcosm of Kāśī, itself microcosm of the universe, it is only natural the Tamil Kedāra temple on Kedāra ghāt has its own black Daṇḍapāni and Kāla Bhairavas guarding the entrance to its interior. Baṭuka and Ādi Bhairavas occupy separate shrines in the same temple at Kamacchā. The two foot tall image of Baṭuka is seated on a silver throne with a beautiful silver mask for his face. At the root of his throne are silver sandals and he is flanked by dogs. The coincidence in the location of Bhairava temples and police stations is sometimes very striking. Not only is the chief *kotwāl* Kāl Bhairva situated precisely in the area called Kotwālī, but the temple of Kshetrapāla Bhairava in the same area is situated inside the police station itself and is especially venerated by the policemen. Where there are Bhairava temples the police stations are generally not far, and this is perhaps true even outside of Banaras. The large Baṭuka Bhairva temple at the foot of Vindhyāchal is exactly face to face with the police station, and it was the police officers who were able to supply me with much of the information regarding the worship there

before proceeding for *darśan* of the Devi herself. According to one informant, the official *Kotwāl* is incharge of eight stations (*thānā*) just as Kāla Bhairava is incharge of the *ashṭbhairva* temples. Just as Bhairava controls the entire city from eight different places so do the police today control the city from eight police stations locoted at (1) Kotwali, (2) Adampura, (3) Jaitpura, (4) Sikraul, (5) Chetganj, (6) Chowk, (7) Daśāśvamedh and (8) Bhelupura. Though there is no one to one correspondence between the eight traditional Bhairvas and these modern administrative units of Vārāṇasi, the analogy is in itself significant and only further research can reveal whether it has any historical basis implying a ritual conception of the traditional (not modern) office of kotwāl.[21] I am also told that just as there are three Inspectors now there were three kotwāls in Vārāṇasī for the city-division of Kotwali, Cantonment and Daśāśvamedh.

According to one graphic description, just as an alien has to produce his particulars before the magistrate in person, likewise pilgrims on reaching the city must first of all take a pious glimpse of Bhairava; as a fugitive criminal fleeing police persecution is free to surrender himself at the court of the magistrate, so are sinner oppressed by the agents of Bhairava free to surrender themselves in the temples of Bhairava himself. Whereas Chītragupta records the deeds, virtuous and sinful, of mortals elsewhere, it is Kāla Bhairava himself who does that in Kāśī. "Even devotees of Viśvanātha, who are not devotees of Bhairava, encounter a multitude of obstacles in Kāśī at every single step" (Eck p. 192, citing *Kāśī-Khaṇḍa* 31.149 and *Tristhalīsetu*, p. 194). Though regularly frequented by the Hindus of the Kotwālpuri area, it is no longer a mandatory stop for pilgrims today, for the professional guides do not bother to bring them there as, according to tradition, they should. As in the case of other dark divinities like Kṛshṇa and the Goddess, the eighth day (*ashṭamī*) of each fortnight, especially the waning fortnight, is specially sacred for Bhairava. And on Bhairavāshṭamī in the month of Mārgaśīrsha (Nov./Dec.). Hindus from all over Banaras flock to his temples, most of all to Kāla Bhairava (Eck. p. 195).

21. The distribution of Bhairava temples, insofar as I have been able to locate them, among the ten divisions of modern Vārāṇasī is given below. This division into wards was done by the city corporation (*Nagaramahāpālikā*) in the 19th century.

(1)	Ādampura	Lāṭ-Bhairava
(2)	Bhelūpura	Ruru, Krodhana, Baṭuka, Ādi and Chaṇḍa Bhairavas
(3)	Chetganj	Bhuta (or Bhīṣaṇa) Bhairava
(4)	Chowk	Āsa Bhairava
(5)	Daśāśvamedh	Ānanda (Mīr ghāt), Saṁhāra, Dvārapāla (inside Viśvanātha temple) and Kāla Bhairavas
(6)	Jaitapura	Ānanda Bhairava (in front of Sankatā Mātā)
(7)	Kotwali	Kāla, Asitāṅga, Kshetrapāla and Saṁhāra Bhairavas
(8)	Sikaraula	
(9)	Sārnāth	(These last 2 divisions are very late additions, there having been only eight divisions originally)
(10)	Śivapura	

This list makes no pretention of being exhaustive.

Bhairava's cudgel or Lāṭ-Bhairava

Just as Indian policemen are traditionally armed with staves, Bhairava too is regularly depicted with a club or cudgel. One subsect of the non-conformist anti-social Pāśupata Śaiva ascetics in fact carried clubs in ritual imitation of their divinized legendary founder Lakulīśa (*lakula* being probably a corruption of *laguḍa* meaning "club"). The term *lāṭh* is itself probably a corruption of *Laguḍa*, and even criminal Kāpālikas carry clubs called *khaṭvāṅga* in ritual imitation of their divinity Bhairava who roams with a human skull in one hand and the club in the other (Lorenzen, pp. 2, 5, esp. 75, 177), or with the skull mounted on the staff itself (p. 75). The pillar, now only a ten-foot tall stump encased in copper sheeting and smeared in vermillion, in Adampura area on the northern fringe of Vārāṇasī where the road to Sārnāth intersects the Grand Trunk Road, is identified with Bhairava's *lāṭh*. Though completely unknown to the Purāṇas, Lāṭ Bhairava is nowadays identified with the Purāṇic Kapāli Bhairava which was originally in the Nāg Kuān area. This pillar, once 32 to 35 feet (Tavernier, 1665) or even 100 feet high (Irwin, 1983, p. 323), has been identified by Sherring, Havell, Vincent Smith as an "Aśokan-pillar", the latter claiming that it was the actual pillar described by Hsuan-Tsang during his visit to Vārāṇasī in 636 A. D. John Irwin suggests that the pillar may have been even pre-Aśokan. In any case, it is clear that its identification with Bhairava's *lāṭh* is a later historical development. "Nothing here—neither the name of the pool nor the name of Bhairava—seems to be in its proper Purānic place, and yet something of this site must be very old, for Hindus have clung to this site despite the fact that their Bhairava has been located right in the middle of a Muslim mosque and sacred tomb site. What is very old here and very sacred is the pillar itself perhaps the Purānic Mahāśmaśān Stambha, the 'Pillar of the Great Cremation Ground,' or the Kula Stambha, the 'Pillar of the Race.' The two pillars were near each other, according to Sukul. The Mahāśmaśāna Stambha was destroyed and its sections are worshipped as Chakrapāni Bhairava and Dandapāni Bhairava today. The Kula Stambha is the one that resembled an Aśokan pillar and was destroyed in the terrible riot of 1809. What is left of it is still honoured at Lāt Bhairava" (Eck, pp. 196 and 389 n. 63, citing Sukul, *Vārāṇasī Vaibhava*, pp. 120-1).

This *lāṭhī*-wielding policeman' function is especially incarnated in Kāla-Bhairava's co worker, Daṇḍapānī or "Club-Carrier", the sheriff of Kāśī (Eck, p. 189). Often referred to as a *bhairava* himself, Daṇḍapānī shares Kāla Bhairava's duties in aiding the Goddess Annapūrṇā in the distribution of alms and in expelling those who are unfit to settle down and die in Kāśī. Though the Kāśī-Khaṇḍa locates him to the south of Viśveśvara and his shrine was incorporated in the great 16th century temple of Viśveśvara, as Kāla Bhairava's also was, today the small shrine of Daṇḍapāṇī is actually located in the Viśvanāth lane, just west of the Jñāna Vāpī mosque which stands on the ruins of the above temple. His identity with Kāla Bhairava becomes explicit in the worship of the pillar fragment of the Mahāśmaśāna Stambha at Lāṭ Bhairava as Daṇḍapāṇī's *daṇḍa* "club" in a small shrine near Kāla Bhairava known popularly by the conglomerate name of Daṇḍapāṇī Bhairava (Eck, pp.

198-201, where she also recounts his Purānic origin-myths).

But Bhairava not only wields the *lāṭh*, he is himself the *lāṭh* especially when it assumes the form of a cosmic pillar or *stambha* (=Vedic *skambha;* Irwin, p. 349). The magical power of Bhairava's Kāpālika followers is sometimes said to reside in their *khaṭvāṅga*, as in one of Somadeva's stories in the *Kathāsaritsāgara* (Lorenzen, pp. 63-3), and the ritual valorization of the often obligatory staff, its transformation into a pillar, itself a form of Bhairava, is explicable only in terms of all three—lāṭh, pillar and Bhairava—being equally identified with the *axis mundi.* To our knowledge, Bhairava's worship in the form of a pillar is not a common phenomenon in North India, and the pole erected to represent the *axis mundi* during the ancient New Year festivals was rather identified with Indra's *dhvaja* or Indra himself.[22] But Śiva too appeared as the *liṅga* of light or *jyotirliṅga*, the phallic symbol that is "the image of the supremacy of Shiva. It is what Mircea Eliade has called the *axis mundi*, the pillar at the center of the world, originating deep in the netherworlds, cracking the surface of the earth, and splitting the roof of the sky" (Eck, p. 109). And it is in Kāśi that Rudra assumes the form of the *axis mundi* before the disputing Vishṇu and Brahmā in order to engender the fiery Bhairava through his anger. "The myth of the *jyotirliṅga* is of major importance to the mythology and symbolism of Kāshī, for here in this city that fiery column of light is said to have appeared (Eck, p. 107). Thus, though it is not wrong to speak of "a hybrid cult" in relation to Lāṭ-Bhairava (Irwin, p. 350), it is not at all anomalous for Bhairava to appear in the form of a cosmic pillar at Kāśī of all places, for Bhairava is, after all, only the terrifying form of Lord Śiva.

Like Śiva-Lākuliśa (Lorenzen, p. 177), in sculptural representations, Bhairava's erect penis is often depicted together with, as if vying with, his club. The identification of the two is again possible only through the equation of the *axis mundi* with the phallus or *liṅga*. As Eck notes, "In some versions, it is Shiva's castrated *liṅga* which is the *liṅga* of fire. In the versions treated here, however, the fiery *liṅga* is not a part of Shiva, but rather Shiva is a part of it" (p. 107). But this assimilation of the phallic dimension of the Śiva-Bhairava cult could have been possible only because the cosmic pillar was already universally identified with the procreative phallus within a specifically cosmogonic context. "Wherver such evidence survives—whether in worship of Vedic *skambha*, Sanskrit *stambha*, Celtic *Irmensul*, Dorian *Agyieus*, or Greek *stauros* (later assimilated to the Christian Cross-cult)—the same sacred pillar or stake was also worshipped in phallic form as symbol of regeneration or resurrection. In archaic myth the pillar which both separated and united heaven and earth at the cosmogony was also conceived as one with the cosmogonic Victory of Light over Darkness, Order

22. See esp. F. B. J. Kuiper, *Varuna and Vidūshaks*: *On the Origin of the Sanskrit Drama* (Amsterdam : North Holland Publishing Co, 1979), pp. 138-142. Though the "texts often refer to the tree as the god himself" (p. 138), Kuiper nevertheless suggests that "except during that short period round about New Year's day, however, the cosmic tree has little to do with Indra but all the more with the gods of totality, such as Viṣṇu" (p. 139),

over Chaos, as Divine symbol of regeneration. Annual reenactment of this 'victory' was the most important event in the prehistoric calendar, its purpose being to revitalize nature and the social order at the end of each year. In this ritual, heaven and earth were imagined as coming together after initial separation to consummate and produce life on earth as the universal parents (Sanskrit *janitri*), the archetypal bridal pair. At the folk-level . . . the pillar symbolized the generative organ with which Father Heaven inseminated Mother Earth" (Irwin, pp. 349-50).

Even after the Stambha became Bhairava's *Lāṭh* the above cosmogonic marriage continues to be re-enacted in the annual wedding ceremonies between Lāṭ-Bhairava and the adjoining well, which is unfallingly included even within the ritual structure of the daily worship of Bhairava. The "*Lāṭ-Bhairo kā vivāh*" (marriage) is always celebrated during the full-moon of the month of Bhādra[23] or August-September. The make-shift temple is heavily decorated, music is played and, in short, everything is made ready to receive the bridegroom who arrives in the form of a large head of Bhairava called "crown" (*mukuṭa*) from the Kālā Bhairava temple. Actually, the procession proceeds from the house of the Lāt-Bhairava temple trustee at Viśveśvaraganj, where the "crown" is normally kept, and gathers together in the vicinity of Kala Bhairava temple. From there it proceeds with much fan-fare through first Jatanbar, back to Viśveśvarganj, then through Kājīmaṇḍī, Baluābīr, Hanumān Phāṭak, Teliyānā (Lāt Bhairava Bāzār) and Jalālīpurā and finally skirts the Kapālamochana tank to reach the Lāṭ-Bhairava temple, where the head is mounted with great efforts on the top of the Lāṭh (which is in fact a big *śivaliṅga*). The "marriage-party from the bridegroom's side" (*bārāt*) is large and accompanied by elephants, musicians, youths performing acrobatic dances with swords, and formerly especially, by singing prostitutes. The Lāṭh is worshipped with vegetarian offerings and flame (*ārati*). The marriage is symbolized by the linking of the Lāṭh and bride called "Bharata's well" (*Bharat-kūp*) through a slender cord tied to both. After a two-day ceremony the head is dismounted and brought back to its house at Viśveśvarganj again under heavy police escort. The head, carried atop a red palanquin, is supposedly quite recent and made with the *ashṭadhātu* as per prescriptions of the *Kāśīkhaṇḍa*, according to one of the trustees. The other occasion on which it is mounted on the Lāṭh is during Bhairavāshṭamī.

The procession underlines in its own way that it is Kāla-Bhairava who is being united in marriage with the well in the form of the phallic world-pillar. The cosmogonic setting is most evident in the erection of the wooden pole always called *liṅga* during the Bisket Jātrā of Bhaktapur which is explicitly a New Year Festival (12th April in 1985). "Some explain this ceremony be seeing therein the procreation between the pole called *liṅgam* (phallus) by everyone and the mound of earth in which it is installed. Others recall that a similar practice existed in the heart of

23. The Muslims in the same area of Adampura also have a tradition of marriage between two "pīrs" called Alaī Shahīd and Gāzī Miyān celebrated on the first Sunday of the month of Jyeshṭha (May-June) likewise with *bārāt* and so on. The possibility and nature of mutual influence with respect to Lāṭ-Bhairava's own marriage is still under investigation.

the Aryan tribes and that it is a matter here of an old Vedic tradition just like that of Indra Jātrā at Kathmandu" (Vezies, p. 24). Thereafter, the inhabitants worship Bhairava installed for the day in the adjacent octagonal pavilion with bloody animal sacrifices. The sexual aspect of the erection of the *liṅga* is further explicitated by the ritual collision of the chariots of Akāśa-Bhairava and Bhadrakālī signifying their copulation at the New Year. The *liṅga* is not only *of* Bhairava but also *is* Bhairava, and the greenery attached to its summit is assimilated to semen, so much so that there is a mad scramble, when the pole is felled the next (New Year's) day, to secure some of this greenery which has the power to bestow children on a barren couple. In this respect, the pole is no different from the imposing erect *liṅga* of the Unmatta-Bhairava at the Paśupatināth temple, which newly-married couples touch reverentially in order to be assured of fertility and offspring. The founding legends are however clear that Bhairava's introduction into the Bisket Jātrā was late, and that formerly it was exclusive to Bhadrakālī. Most significantly, he is identified with Kāla-Bhairava (not distinguished from Kāśī-Viśvanāth) who came all the way from Vārāṇasī.

The ease with which Bhairava, in the form of the *liṅga*, has been assimilated to the earlier cosmogonic pillar-cult would seem to suggest that both forms of cult, though independent of each other in their concrete manifestations, are ultimately generated within a common framework of esoteric psycho-physical techniques, where the *axis mundi* would itself only be the macrocosmic projection of the central spinal column or, rather, the fiery ascent of the vital energy through its median channell (*sushumnā*).[24] It is thus only natural that Kāśī, as the very centre of the universe where the *axis mundi* is located, should be under the suzerainty of Bhairava who shed his sin of brahminicide at the very site where the world-pillar was standing. "The myth of the fiery *liṅga* begins and ends in Kāshī. In Kāshī mythology this is the place where the light split the earth, and this is the place called Kapālamochana Tīrtha, 'Where the Skull Fell' . . . In Kāshī's spiritual tradition, however, it is affirmed that the *liṅga* of light did not merely burst forth from the earth *in* Kāshī. Rather it *was* Kāshī, the 'Luminous.' The entire sacred field included within the Panchakroshī Road *is* the *liṅga* of light" (Eck, p. 109).

Bhairava conquers Death in Kāśī

"Death in Kāshī is not a death feared, for here the ordinary God of Death, frightful Yama, has no jurisdiction. Death in Kāshī is death known and faced, transformed and transcended" (Eck, p. 24). One could easily reverse the causality and affirm that, if Yama is exiled from Kāśī, this is because he represents not Death as such but natural death, death unmastered that overtakes the cringing mortal and shatters his life aspirations. Hence, the apparent paradox that Kāśī, the Mahaśmāśāna or "Great Cremation Ground of the entire Universe," where every pious Hindu hopes to die, is the only city from which the God of Death is himself excluded (cf. Eck, p. 325). But death in

24. See esp. F. B. J. Kuiper, "Cosmogony and Conception : A Query," in *History of Religions*, 10, no. 2 (November 1970), 124-30. The article has since been reproduced in Kuiper (1983), see n. 8.

Kāśī is willing death, sometimes even taking the legitimized form of religious suicide,[25] death "transformed and transfigured" and Bhairava, by usurping the throne of Yama in Kāśī, must necessarily represent what one could rightly term an *initiatic* death. "Yama, the God of Death, may not approach the dead here, noose in hand. Kāla Bhairava takes charge of the dead, and he is Shiva's own servant, indeed, Shiva's own self. Even if there is some terrible punishment to be meted out, it is guaranteed to be short-lived and to be followed by the bliss of liberation" (Eck, pp. 344, cf. also p. 193). Jonathan Parry has elaborately demonstrated that cremation in Kāśī, homologized with the cosmic dissolution (*pralaya*), is conceived as a form of fire sacrifice, wherein the sacrificer (chief mourner) is identified with the divinty (Śiva) through the mediation of the victim in the form of the dead-body (*śava* = Śiva). Emphasizing the cosmogonic function of this perpetual process of cremation, he has sought to explain why "while in India the cremation ground is generally on the periphery or outside the area of human settlement, in Kāshi it is at the very hub. Just as India is said to be the 'navel' (*nābhī*) of the world, and Kāshi the navel of India, Maṇikarnikā is the navel of Kāshi" (Parry, 1981, p. 337; there is in fact an image of Baṭuka Bhairava beside that of Śmaśānanātha near the *dhuni* at Maṇikarṇikā).

What is important, in the present context, is that the funerary rites in Kāśi transform natural death into the most concrete and vivid symbol of a sacrificial or initiatic death that can even occur prior to and independently of physical death as the inevitable lot of all mortals. We would like to suggest here that, if the adepts of Bhairava, being themselves Bhairava incarnate, did not fear death anywhere, this was because they had already undergone an initiatic death *even while living* and the subsequent natural death was, for them, only a faint shadow and tangible physical symbol of this initiatic death. In fact, in the origin-myth, the Kāpālika Kāla-Bhairava is so called because even (Time—) Death (*Kāla*) is afraid of him and he is rewarded with eternal suzerainty over Kāśī precisely in return for his decapitation of Brahmā, for his transgressive act of *brahmahatyā*. This is apparently one of the main reasons the Kaulas worshipped Bhairava. Abhinavagupta (a brahmin!) is proudly affirmed by the Kashmiri teachers to be Bhairava incarnate and he himself declares this identity in his hymns like the *Bhairavastava*, where he exultantly challenges Death: "O Death (= Time)! do not cast thy gaze most terrible with anger on me; (for) steadfast in the service of Śankara and ever meditating on him, I am the terrifying power of Bhairava" (see n. 16 above). If the pilgrims to Kāśi do not fear death there, this would be because their pilgrimage to the Mahāśmaśāna is conceived on the ritual model of Bhairava's own arrival at Kāśī for absolution from his terrible sin and his subsequent establishment there.

For the ordinary Kāśi-dweller, however, this initiatic death is supposed to occur only at the time of its natural counterpart, and it intervenes during the latter process in the form of the "punishment of Bhairava" (*bhia-*

25. J. P. Parry, "Death and Cosmogony in Kashi," *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, 15 (1981), 349-50. The distinction between the "good" death and the "bad" death (esp. *akālamṛtyu*) is developped by Parry in (1982), pp. 82-84.

ravī yātanā) whose "dispensation is an important part of Bhairava's function in the city" (Eck, p. 193). In the context of the *karma*-doctrine, the *bhairavī yātanā* seems to have been improvised to explain and justify how the worst sinners could gain liberation by simply dying in Kāśī, whereas the most virtuous of saints despair of obtaining the same elsewhere. Do not sinners have to expiate their bad *karma* before becoming even eligible for *moksha* ? "The mechanism by which all this *karma* is experienced is the *bhairavī yātanā.* Because it is called a 'punishment' one can only conclude that it applies especially to the experiencing of bad *karma*. Bhairava's punishment is brief, lasting but a moment, and very intense. It is a kind of compression chamber of experience in which the *karmas*, which might ordinarily land one in hell or in countless difficult births and rebirths, are experienced completely in a split second" (Eck, p. 338). But there is an inherent ambiguity in the term "punishment of Bhairava" that must not be lost sight of; is it simply the accepted punishment at the hands of the terrifying chief-of-police of Kāśī (Eck, p. 337) or rather the "sufferings of Bhairava" himself in his equally terrifying expiatory role of criminal Kāpālika (Parry, 1981, pp. 345, 355) ? The question becomes all the more significant when we consider that it was at the Kula Stambha, now the Lāth-Bhairava, beside the Kapālamochana Tīrtha where the Kāpālika-Bhairava was freed of his heinous crime, that this intense suffering is undergone. "It was here, they said, that Bhairava would administer his punishment, the *bhairavī yātanā*, as a moment's prelude to liberation" (Eck, p. 196). Is it not strange that the *kotwāl* Bhairava should mete out his "punishment" at the very spot where the Kāpālika Bhairava was himself freed of his own "suffering"?

This paradoxical fusion of two opposing meanings can perhaps best be resolved by assuming that the *bhairavī yātanā* ultimately refers not to Bhairava as the giver or receiver of puishment but to the suffering involved in the initiatic death which alone can confer liberation at the time of natural death. "In the case of a man of great spiritual force a kind of spontuneous combustion cracks open his skull to release the vital breath . . . . An image of the way in which the soul might ideally emerge was provided by the case of an old householder, whose extraordinary spiritual development had gained him a circle of devoted disciples, and whose subsequent mortuary rituals I attended. His copybook death was said to have been consummated on his funeral pyre when his burning corpse successively manifested itself to a privileged few in the forms of the celebrated religious leaders Sai Baba, Mehar Baba and Rama Krishna Paramhamsa. *as the terrifying god Bhairava* (Lord Śiva's *kotvāl* or 'police-chief' in Benares) and finally as Śiva himself. A rounded protuberance was seen *to move up the spine* of the corpse, *burst through the skull*, soar into the air and split into three parts. One fell in Benares, another went north to the abode of Śiva in the Himalayas and nobody knows what happened to the third" (Parry, 1982, pp. 82-3; underlining ours).

So powerful are the structured images of the inner lived experience of initiatic death projected onto the Hindu symbolic universe, that it has actually become possible for the pious to really "see" the process taking place in the dead or dying adept ! If the *bhairavī yātanā* is adminstered at the Lāṭ-Bhairava, this would not only be because the *lāṭh* is the obvious instrument of punishment at the hands of the *kotwāl*, but also because the Lāṭ-

Bhairava as *axis mundi* is only the macrocosmic projection of the spinal column, and the initiatic death involved the forcing up of the vital airs through the *sushumnā* in the form of a fire-ball that pierces through the cranium at the "aperture of Brahmā" (*brahmarandhra*). Only such an understanding of Bhairava's staff would explain the definition of the Kāpālika's *khaṭvāṅga* as a "banner made of a skull mounted on a stick (*daṇḍa*)" (Lorenzen, p. 75; citing Vijñāneśvara's *Mitākshara* commentary on *Yājñavalkya* iii. 243), resembling the head mounted on the Lāṭ-Bhairava itself during. festive occasions. Not only does the sacred mystic geography of Kāśī confirm that cremation at Maṇikarṇikā is understood in terms of the adept's fiery ascent up the *sushumnā*, but the appellation of the latter in esoteric tantric texts as *Śmaśāna* very clearly reveals that it is this ascent that constitutes the real or initiatic death. Though Kāśī is sometimes identified with the *ājñā-chakra*, mystic centre between the nose and the eyebrows, it is also identified with the subtle body as a whole. "The rivers Asī and Varuṇā at the extremities of the city, and a third river which flows through the centre, are identified with the three main veins of the yogic body—respectively with the iḍā, piṅgalā and sushumnā (. . .). Under normal conditions, at least, the third river is not visible and its precise location open to interpretation. Some of the more theologically sophisticated of my own informants identified it with the Brahmanālā, a small rivulet of which there are now no obvious traces but which is supposed to have issued into the Gaṅgā at Maṇikarṇikā. According to this identification. then, the central vein of Kāśī's mystical body thus terminates at the cremation ground, equating it with the highest centre of the yogic anatomy. In this context, it is perhaps worth recalling that two synonyms found in the texts for *suushmnā* are *brahmanāḍī* (—*brahmanāla* ?) and *śmaśāna* (cremation ground)" (Parry, 1982, p. 343 and n. 8). I have found the same mystic geography of three rivers centering on shrines of Bhairava in Nepal, the third river being either visible as in Tika Bhairava at the southern limit of the Kathmandu Valley or invisible as in the case of Unmatta Bhairava at Panauti.

According to one of my informants, not originally resident of Banaras and at that time rather ignorant of these matters, the gathering of the vital energies at the base of the spine and their forced penetration up the median canal is accompanied by intense and almost unbearable suffering, especially to one who is unprepared, and is an experience verging on self-annihilation, like death. He claims that this occured to him rather suddenly and unexpectedly while he was wholly committed to a transgressive attitude, and he withdrew prematurely before the process could take its proper course, as he felt he was yet not ready to die. If this could be taken as a reliable guide to understanding the initiatic death of the adepts of Bhairava, it would not be difficult to explain how the *bhairavī yātanā* could have the ambiguous meaning we noted above. Insofar as the adept is completely identified with Bhairava, the initiatic death would be the "suffering of Bhairava" himself; but insofar as it is conceived of as being as it were imposed on the pilgrim, it would be the "punishment" meted out by Bhairava. The idea of "punishment" in the *bhairavī yātanā* seems to have been introduced only to satisfy the *karma* doctrine indissociable from a sacred of interdictions, that is also wholly responsible for Bhairava's having to expiate his brahminicide through

his twelve-year long *kapālavrata*. But it is radically contradicted by our knowledge that the adepts of Bhairava, whether Kāpālikas, Aghoris or Nāths, sought to transcend both good and evil, to conquer death and attain a mode of immortality, through an uncompromisingly transgressive sacrality. Though Kāśī is the sacred city where Bhairava was absolved of his sin of brahminicide, he was rewarded with suzerainty over it precisely because he had carried out the order to decapitate Brahmā's fifth head.

Bhairava : Policeman, Criminal and Supreme Divinity of Transgression

Throughout this article we have alluded to, even played upon, the contradiction between Bhairava being at the same time chief policeman-magistrate of Kāśī and also a heinous criminal divinity adored especially by anti-social ascetics who flagrantly transgressed even the most fundamental socio-religious norms and rules. It is now necessary to pose this paradox explicity. For a *kotwāl* expected to punish criminals for their sins, Bhairava has the truly bizarre function in Kāśī of taking upon himself or devouring the the sins of pilgrims so much so that one of his title is "Sin-Eater" (*Pāpabhakshaṇa*). "Here in Kāshī the place called Kapālamocana comes to symbolize the power to make sins fall away, for here 'Where the Skull Fell' the worst of sins was shed" (Eck, p., 119). The temple of Kāla Bhairava itself was, according to the *Kāśī-Khaṇḍa* (31.138), located on the banks of the Kapālamochana Tīrtha, in the Omkāreśvara area north of Maidāgin. "Bhairava stands right there," says the text, "facing Kapālamocana Tīrtha, devouring the accumulated sins of devotees" (cited from Eck, p. 193). Bhairava is the "sin-eater" par excellence not because of his newly found office of policeman but by virtue of having himself been the worst of criminals, for Kapālamochana is the very place where the skull of the murdered Brahmā fell from him along with the sin of brahminicide that had been relentlessly pursuing him in his wanderings. "The one freed from the worst sin now devours the sins of others" (Eck, p. 192).

The most important festival dedicated to this guardian policeman-magistrate of Kāśī is Bhairavāshṭamī, which, instead of celebrating his investure with the office of *kotwāl*, on the contrary celebrates the birth of Bhairava, born only to perpetrate his brahminicide immediately. "On this day alone, the cloth apron that covers all but Kāla-Bhairava's face is removed. He is garlanded with a necklace of solid silver skulls. People crowd in for the *darshana* of his complete image on this day" (Eck, p. 274). Not only do the priests officiating at the temple know the originmyth of the brahminicide Bhairava by heart, it is also inscribed in Hindi on a marble slab on the wall (Eck, pp. 194-5), and forms of Bhairava are painted on the temple-walls bearing the bleeding head of Brahma. One is never sure whether it is the *kotwāl* that is being worshipped or rather the brahminicide *kāpālika*-Bhairava. The myth and along with it the ordinary worshipper, seeks to rationalize and minimize these two incompatible identities of Bhairava by inserting a diachrony between them : Bhairava becomes *kotwāl* of Kāśī only after he has purified himself from the crime of brahminicide at Kāpālamochana. Does this mean that he has completely lost his criminal character ? Why could not a non-criminal god, like Hanumān or Gaṇeśa, have been elected as *kotwāl* of this most sacred of cities ? It could perhaps be claimed that, having been an ex-criminal,

Bhairava was ideally suited to fulfil the role of (reformed) policeman. But a synchronic view necessarily impose itself because, even while Bhairava has remained *kotwāl* of Vārāṇasī (and *kshetrapāla* all over India), there have always been and still are tantric sects like the Kāpālikas, Kaulas and Nāthas which worship him primarily as a Transgressor and certainly in a transgressive mode (for example with the *pañchamakāra* . . .). I have elsewhere demonstrated (see n. 1 above) that Bhairava's lopping off Brahmā's fifth head with his left thumb-nail is symbolic as all manner of transgressions of brahminical socio-religious norms (assimilated in the *dharmaśāstra* to "*brahmahatyā*").

Moreover, if Bhairava has already once and for all been purified of his terrible sin, how could he continue to play the impure role of scapegoat by taking over, tainting himself with, the sins of others ? True such a scapegoat role is also played by the mask of Akāsh Bhairab during the Ghaṇṭākarṇa festival in Kathmandu when all the evil of the locality is discharged upon him at the cross-roads of Indra-Chowk. But the fact that at all other crossroads exactly the same function is performed by effigies of real demons who are subsequently expelled, reveals that it is through his quasi-demonical aspect that (Akash) Bhairava has come to play this role. The paradox is raised to a second order when we realize that, whereas after his absolution Bhairava is worshipped as a mere *kotwāl* subservient to a higher divinity like Viśvanātha or his consort Annapūrṇā, before his absolution Bhairava is already recognized, even in his degraded condition, as the Supreme Divinity, second not even to Brahmā and Vishṇu.

Bhairava's twelve-year wanderings as a beggar, bearing Brahmā's skull as public testimony to his crime and begging from the seven houses of the seven Sages in the Daru forest, all these and other traits, like his exclusion from settlements and inhabiting the cremation grounds, correspond exactly to the prescribed punishment for brahminicide in the brahminical law books (Stietencron, 1969, p. 867; Lorenzen, pp. 74-76). But whereas in Hindu society such brahminicides, even if brahmins themselves, were treated as horrible outcastes and considered wholly degraded, Bhairava is exalted in the myth as the supreme divinity by Brahmā and Vishṇu, the latter even recognizing that he remains untainted by the sin of brahminicide. Though the punishment of Bhairava corresponds perfectly to the norms of brahminical orthodoxy, his *simultaneous* exaltation corresponds rather to the doctrines and practices of the Kāpālika ascetics, who took the brahminical Bhairava for their divine archetype. Even when themselves not originally brahminicides, these Kāpālikas performed the Mahāvrata or "Great Penance" bearing the skull of a brahmin in order to attain the blissful state of liberation and the lordship that confers the eight-fold magical powers (Lorenzen, pp. 92-95). Following the "doctrine of Soma", the Kāpālikas experienced the spiritual bliss of Bhairava in the felicity of sexual union induced and enhanced by the partaking of meat and wine. Whereas Bhairava is presented in the myth as undertaking the "*kāpālika* vow" as punishment in order to expiate his brahminicide, the Kāpālikas in pursuit of their "supreme penance" (*mahāvrata*) have always been associated with human sacrifices (Lorenzen, pp. 85 87), the ideal victim being a brahmin, and it is clear that brahminicide

or, rather, whatever it symbolizes, was itself supposed to be productive of great power.

If the intention of the *brahmaśiraśchheda* myth could be reduced to a narrow sectarian exaltation of an extra-brahminical Bhairava or the deliberate devaluation of the brahmin, there would have been no sense in Śiva instructing Bhairava to strictly conform to the brahminical legal prescriptions for the expiation of brahminicide. The fact that Bhairava scrupulously performs it amounts to a full valorization of the brahmin (= Brahmā; cf. Eck, n. on p. 108) as demanded by traditional Hindu society. At the same time, it could not have been intended to glorify Brahmā as such, for the latter clearly admits the supremacy of Bhairava, and even Vishṇu lauds him as the Supreme Reality despite his outward appearance as a criminal beggar steeped in impurity. The real conflict is rather between the two opposing poles of the Sacred, one of interdiction incarnated in the chaste, pure, self-denying classical brahmin and the other of transgression represented by the hedonstic, impure Kāpālika-Bhairava who beheads this brahmin or his divinity. The myth in its essence reveals a compromise between the socio-religious point of view which must necessarily condemn Bhairava to be an outcaste criminal and the esoteric valorization of transgressive sacrality that exalts him as the supreme divinity, *both* precisely because he has committed the transgression par excellence in brahminical society. From the exoteric socio-religious point of view, Bhairava is no more than the terrible policeman god protecting the boundaries of the socio-religious community and, as door-keeper, the access to its temples from hostile external forces. He preserves the socially central divinity, like Viśvanātha in Kāśi, from any direct contact with impure elements which are nevertheless vital for the proper functioning of the social organism as a whole.[26] The terrifying divinity of transgression can never become the object of public cult as such and the only means for him to receive communal worship is by transforming himself into the equally terrifying protector-god for a more central pacific and benign divinity (with whom he is nevertheless often subtly identified). Thus Kāla-Bhairava's promised suzerainty over Kāśi has been translated in reality into his being the policeman-magistrate for Lord Viśvanātha. The myth achieves this "conversion" from criminal to *kotwāl* through Bhairava's "purification" at Kapālamochana Tīrtha

26. Biardeau (1981) p. 149. It must be borne in mind that the old Viśvanātha temple was inaccessible, on account of his pure brahminical character, to the untouchables. "There is the New Kāshi Vishvanātha Temple at Mīr Ghāt, containing a Shiva *liṅga* that was established by very orthodox brahmins when, according to their traditions, the old Vishvanātha *liṅga* was rendered impure by the entry of Harijans ("untouchables") into the temple after 1956." (Eck, p. 135; cf. also p. 229). Not only was the Kāla Bhairava temple, on the contrary, frequented by impure ascetics like the Kāpālikas and later Nāths, but Bhairava, like Rudra before him, often manifested himself in the form of an outcaste (*chāṇḍāla*) or even tribal. It is on the basis of such phenomena that Bhairava has been dubbed a "folk" or "popular" deity and exaggerated claims have been made for his "tribal origin."

at Kāśi. But if he remains there, even in his capacity as *kotwāl*, as the scapegoat "sin-eater" par excellence upon whom devotees and pligrims can shed all their evil, would this not be because, even as a criminal Kāpālika, he had already transcended both good and evil and always remained untainted by them ? (cf. O'Flaherty, 1976, p. 167 on Indra).

The question why Bhairava, the supreme divinity of Transgression, had to come to Kāśī, the Centre of the whole Universe, of all places, in order to be promoted from criminal to policeman, will have to be answered in my subsequent article on "Bhairava : Transgression and Embryogony in Kāśī"[27].

27. To appear in Bradley Hertel and Rana P. B. Singh ed. *Vārānasī : Centre of Indian Culture*.